

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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-----122337Z 077275 /66

R 121119Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3353
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT IN
SUBJECT: WHITHER THE CONGRESS PARTY

REF: NEW DELHI 6593

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. AS REPORTED REFTEL, MRS. GANDHI
WAS SUCCESSFUL IN INSTALLING HER NOMINEE AS THE PRESIDENT
OF THE CONGRESS PARTY: FORMER HOME MINISTER BRAHMANANDA
REDDI. SHE BACKED HIM AS ONE WHO WOULD DO HER BIDDING AND
AS ONE WHO, BECAUSE HE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EMERGENCY,
WOULD DEFEND MRS. GANDHI AND HER ADMINISTRATION. TWO
QUESTIONS EMERGE: HOW WAS SHE ABLE TO IMPOSE HERSELF ANEW
ON THE CONGRESS PARTY AND WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY
WHICH SHE FOR THE TIME BEING DOMINATES?

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A MAJORITY OF SENIOR CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS BELIEVE
THAT MRS. GANDHI CONTINUES TO HAVE A NATIONAL FOLLOWING
GREATER THAN OF ANY OTHER CONGRESS POLITICIAN AND THAT
THIS IS A CRITICAL ASSET FOR THE PARTY. THERE IS ALSO
UNCORROBORATED SPECULATION THAT MRS. GANDHI CONTROLS FUNDS
BADLY NEEDED BY THE PARTY.

FOLLOWING REDDI'S ELECTION THERE HAVE BEEN RESIGNATIONS AND THREATS TO RESIGN FROM THE PARTY. FOR THE MOMENT, THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY SEEMS LOCKED IN PLACE FOR WANT OF ANYWHERE ELSE TO GO. THERE HAVE, HOWEVER, BEEN SIGNIFICANT DEFLECTIONS FROM AMONG THE NON-COMMUNIST "LIBERALS", MOST PROMINENT OF WHOM IS FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER DINESH SINGH. HE AND OTHERS HAVE PROTESTED THE FAILURE OF THE PARTY TO REFORM FOLLOWING ITS ELECTORAL DEBACLE. REDDI'S ACCESSION AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT AHS ALSO BADLY SPLIT THE CONGRESS IN THE SOUTHERN STATES.

FOR THE NEAR TERM, THE CONGRESS PARTY WILL BE UNABLE SIGNIFICANTLY TO PLAY ITS TRADITIONAL ROLE AS THE UNIFIER OF INDIA'S DIVERSE GROUPS. THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF EFFORTS UNDERWAY TO REVITALIZE THE PARTY, AND 1977-78 ARE FORECAST AS BLEAK YEARS. THE LONGER TERM OUTLOOK FOR THE CONGRESS, FUNCTIONING MAINLY AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY, IS BRIGHTER.

END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. THERE ARE ESSENTIALLY THREE GROUPS IN THE CONGRESS PARTY: THE CONSERVATIVES WHO AT LEAST TACITLY SUPPORTED THE EMERGENCY, THE LEFT WING WHICH HAS SUPPORTED POLITICAL ALLIANCES WITH THE CPI AND WHICH NOW IS CRITICAL OF THE "EXCESSES" OF THE EMERGENCY, AND THE NON-COMMUNIST "LIBERALS" WHO NOW ARE ALSO CRITICAL OF THE EMERGENCY. THE RESULTS OF THE MAY 6 ALL INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE (AICC) POLLING (REFTEL) INDICATE THAT THE FIRST OF THESE GROUPS PREDOMINATES. EIGHT OF THE TEN ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS WORKING COMMITTEE ARE FROM THIS GROUP AND ARE ASSOCIATED WITH THE FORMER

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PM. IN THEIR VIEW MRS. GANDHI STILL HAS A PERSONAL FOLLOWING GREATER THAN THAT OF ANY OTHER CONGRESS LEADER, AS ASSET WHICH IS CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE OF THE PARTY. OTHERS SPECULATE THAT MRS. GANDHI'S ABILITY TO CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE PARTY IS IN LARGE MEASURE DUE TO HER CONTROL OF FUNDS. THE PARTY COFFERS ARE REPORTEDLY ALMOST EMPTY, BUT SHE IS RUMORED TO POSSESS MUCH OF THE MONEY COLLECTED FROM BUSINESS FIRMS TO FINANCE THE LAST ELECTION. GIVEN THE REDUCED ABILITY OF THE CONGRESS TO RAISE MONEY, THE MONEY WHICH SHE ALLEGEDLY CONTROLS IS CONSIDERED CRUCIAL.

2. DESPITE ITS INABILITY TO ELECT S.S. RAY, FORMER CHIEF MINISTER OF WEST BENGAL, AS PARTY PRESIDENT, THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY WILL PROBABLY NOT DEFECT. THIS IS LESS OUT OF LOYALTY THAN THE FACT THAT IT HAS NOWHERE ELSE TO GO. GIVEN THE AFFINITY FOR THE CPI OF LEFT-WINGERS SUCH AS FORMER STEEL MINISTER CHANDRAJIT YADAV, FORMER PARTY PRESIDENT D.K. BAROOAH, AND FORMER LABOR MINISTER RAGHUNATHA REDDY, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THEY WOULD FIND A PLACE IN THE JANATA PARTY.

WHILE THERE ARE RUMORS OF PLANS BY INDIVIDUALS IN THIS GROUP TO DEFECT, WE SUSPECT THAT THIS IS INTERNDED BY THEM TO INCREASE THEIR BARGAINING POSITION WITHIN THE CONGRESS.

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3. MOST LIKELY TO DEFECT ARE THE NON-COMMUNIST "LIBERALS" THE MOST PROMINENT OF THEM TO DO SO THUS FAR IS THE FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER, DINESH SINGH, WHO PULLED OUT WITH NINE OTHER SENIOR CONGRESSMEN. SINGH IS QUOTED BY THE PRESS AS SAYING: "WE EXPECTED A CHANGE IN THE PARTY'S FUNCTIONING AFTER LIFTING THE EMERGENCY. THERE WAS NO CHANGE, THERE WAS NO INNER PARTY DEMOCRACY". WHILE THE FORMER MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING, KARAN SINGH (ONE OF THE FEW CONGRESSMEN TO BE RETURNED TO THE PARLIAMENT FROM THE NORTH) HAS NOT YET RESIGNED, HE LAMBASTED THE "PRESENT POWER STRUCTURE IN THE PARTY" IN A LETTER TO ITS PRESIDENT. HE SAID THE CONGRESS IS TODAY " FACING A MASSIVE CRISIS OF PUBLIC CONFIDENCE" AND THAT THE ONLY WAY FOR THE PARTY TO RETURN TO ITS FORMER ROLE IS "TO UNDERTAKE A SUSTAINED EXERCISE IN RUTHLESS INTROSPECTION, CLEANSING AND SELF-PURIFICATION."

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HE CRITICIZED THE PARTY LEADERSHIP FOR HAVING LEARNED NOTHING FROM ITS DEFEAT AND PREDICTED ANOTHER "MAJOR DEBACLE IN THE STATE POLLS.

4. ANOTER SENIOR CONGRESSMAN TO ATTACK THE CONGRESS LEADERSHIP IS THE FORMER SPEAKER OF THE LOK SABHA, B. R. BHAGAT. HE ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS CONTEMPLATING RESIGNING. FORMER MINISTER OF STATE FOR SHIPPING AND TRANSPORT, H. M. TRIVEDI, WHO LABELS HIMSELF A "TECHNOCRAT", RESIGNED FROM THE PARTY CLAIMING THAT IT WAS NO LONGER POSSIBLE FOR PERSONS LIKE HIMSELF TO CONTRIBUTE "TOWARDS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE IDEALS OF THE CONGRESS".

5. ON A REGIONAL BASIS THE PRESS HAS REPORTED SERIOUS DEFLECTIONS FROM THE CONGRESS IN ASSAM AND OTHER PARTS OF THE NORTHEAST. MORE IMPORTANT IS THE IMPACT WHICH THE SELECTION OF BRAHMANANDA REDDI AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT WILL HAVE ON THE PARTY'S POSITION IN THE SOUTH. THE KERALA CONGRESS PARTY HEADED BY A. K. ANTONY, WHO IS NOW THE CHIEF MINISTER FOR THE STATE, HAD SUPPORTED S.S. RAY OVER REDDI. ANTONY REPORTEDLY WAS THE ONLY PERSON AT THE GAUHATI MEETING OF THE AICC LAST NOVEMBER TO CRITICIZE THE EMERGENCY. IN KARNATAKA, THE PARTY IS SPLIT, WITH A MAJORITY BELIEVED TO HAVE SUPPORTED S. S. RAY. AND IN REDDI'S HOME STATE OF ANDHRA PRADESH, HIS SELECTION HAS VERY MUCH DISPLEASED THE CHIEF MINISTER, VENGAL RAO, A LONG-TIME POLITICAL OPPONENT. IT ALSO BROUGHT ABOUT THE RESIGNATION OF K. RAGHUREMAIAH, FORMERLY MINISTER FOR PARTLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND CHIEF WHIP IN THE LOWER HOUSE. POLITICAL RIVALRY BASED UPON CASTE IS SAID TO EXPLAIN RAGHURAMAIAH'S ANTIPATHY TOWARD REDDI. IN SUM, THE CONGRESS PARTY IS BADLY DIVIDED THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH.

6. THE HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE CONGRESS PARTY WAS CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT IT UNIFIED THE COUNTRY BY HARMONIZING THE INTERESTS OF INDIA'S DIVERSE CASTE, RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, AND LINGUISTIC GROUPS. FOR THE NEAR FUTURE THIS ROLE HAS BEEN SUSPENDED. AT PRESENT THERE IS NO SERIOUS THINKING WITHIN THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP AS TO HOW TO REVITALIZE IT. THE OLD DEFEATED LEADERS WITH THEIR OLD IDEAS CONTINUE TO DOMINATE. 1977 AND PROBABLY 1978 ARE EXPECTED TO BE BLEAK

YEARS. A SENIOR AICC STAFFER TOLD US THAT THE SOMEWHAT LONGER TERM PICTURE FOR THE CONGRESS PARTY WAS BRIGHTER. IN THE FIRST PLACE THERE IS A NEED FOR AN OPPOSITION PARTY, AND THIS ROLE WILL ASSURE THE PARTY'S EXISTENCE. SECONDLY, THOSE CONGRESSMEN WHO WIN OFFICE AT THE STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS WILL HAVE GENUINE POLITICAL CREDIBILITY AND THEY WILL COME INCREASINGLY TO DOMINATE THE PARTY. AND FINALLY, THE PARTY HAS AN IMPORTANT ASSET IN ITS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE WHICH WOULD SURVIVE TO SERVE A STRENGTHENED PARTY AT A LATER DATE. WE FIND HIS REASONS CONGENT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
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Decapton Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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TAGS: PINT, IN, CONGRESS PARTY, (GANDHI, INDIRA)
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